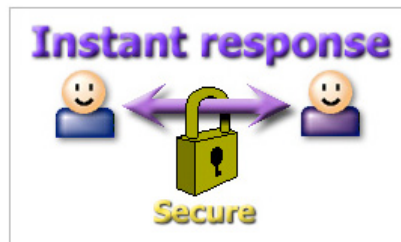


**"IM"**  
**INSTANT MESSAGING**  
***Pam Farrill- Middle School Assistant Principal***  
***Susan DiLeo, Middle School Guidance Counselor***

In this day of technology, we encourage our students to explore the resources that are available to help them with their academic assignments. However, it has come to our attention that as students use their computers to communicate with each other, problems are surfacing with ***Instant Messaging, known as IM.*** This note is intended to share with you the concerns that have arisen so that we may work in partnership with families to protect our children.



Anyone who is connected with AOL or a similar service has access to ***Instant Messaging.*** A student creates a profile of favorite interests, hobbies, personal quote along with name and home address. After generating a "screen name", students can be contacted by anyone who knows them personally or may find their profile of interest. Students who wish can "block out" unwanted contacts, but usually don't exercise this option.

***IM*** is appropriately used by many children to communicate with friends. In many cases, it is a helpful means to find out what assignments are due, organize school events, etc. In some cases, however, this means of communication has been used to speak negatively about other students. This year, we have had numerous students and parents contact us regarding highly slanderous, inappropriate and in some cases threatening ***IMs*** that have been received on their home computer. Often times, these offensive or despicable messages have nothing to do with school. They have been created late at night or on weekends when students are away from the watchful eye of their parents.

As the effects of these *IMs* trickle into school, students are demonstrating the emotional impact from this electronic communication. As educators, we have offered our support and counsel the students and their families. On occasion, we have sought assistance from our Resource Officer, Ron Benoit and recommended that families report the content of the *IMs* to the police.

*Instant Messaging* is here to stay; there is nothing a school can do to make it go away. However, as educators we can teach students about the dangers of using this means of communication inappropriately. In addition, we implore you to consider the following if your child is using *Instant Messaging* at home.

1. Have a frank discussion regarding the fact that Instant Messaging is available to anyone in the world to use. It can be used by any stranger, even predators, throughout the world to contact your child.
2. Sit with your child at the computer and have him or her show you his or her profile that is out there for the entire world to see. Make sure that there is nothing that could be misinterpreted, particularly as hobbies, interests, or personal quote.
3. Review the screen name your child has chosen and ask why they have chosen this to represent themselves.
4. Review the “away message” left when your child leaves the computer. Sometimes these statements are suggestive and inappropriate.
5. As a caution, limit the time that your child spends using *Instant Messaging*. Too many students are spending too much time on the computer and not doing their homework.

It is impossible to do a good job on homework if your child is being continually interrupted by the “bing” of *IM*.

6. Know that it is possible to print copies of any *IM* or emails that your child sends. It is not a violation of your child’s rights to be monitoring what is being said on your home computer. We have had a situation this fall where one family’s home computer was taken off line for a considerable period due to vulgar *IMs* back and forth with a stranger.

Remember you are the moral compass for your child. Please know what your child is doing at home on your computer. If you have any suspicion that this *Instant Messaging* is being used inappropriately your child or his/her friend, turn off *IM*. If you need assistance, please do not hesitate to go to the Shrewsbury Police. They are willing to investigate whenever a suggestive message is taken to them.